

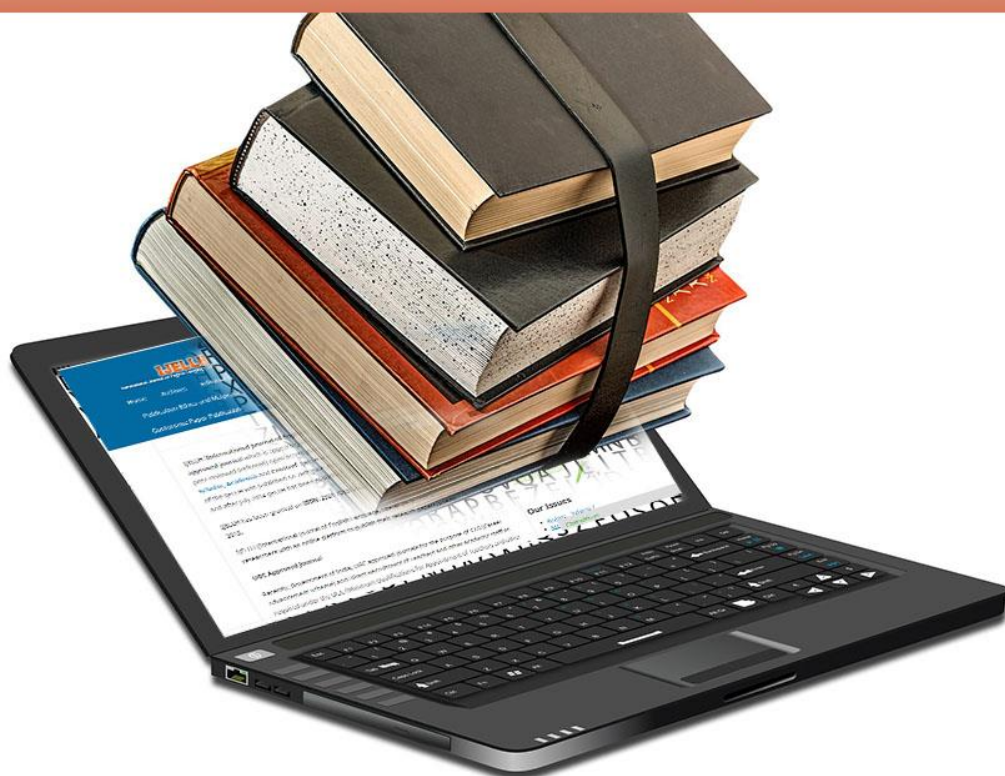
**ISSN** INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER

ISSN-2321-7065

**IJELLH**

# International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal



**Volume 7, Issue 3, March 2019**

[www.ijellh.com](http://www.ijellh.com)

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The process of assimilation and the resultant transformation in an alien land: A study of

Bharti Mukherjee's *Jasmine*

#### Abstract

The term Diaspora literally refers to man's scattering in an Alien soil, far away from homeland. It implies a cultural Travel; a nostalgic reminiscence of whom- the culture of origin and an anchoring in the new world-the culture of adoption. It does not have a wondering existence though it always carries the memory of the original homeland. South-Asian diasporic writers share a common diasporic consciousness and a structural and thematic framework. Many of them have received international recognition. These writers are known for introducing new themes and diverse techniques in their works. A unique form of literature is created by diasporic writers creating nostalgia yet forging identities with new place and people. Thus, diaspora is no more a painful experience in alienation and marginalization for these individual writers of South-Asian Diaspora. The sense of homelessness and nostalgia for their motherland is surely one of the most important themes in literature. On the one hand, they regret the loss of their homeland, creating mythical stories about it through memory and imagination; on the other, they make expatriation a positive act of distancing and achieving a true perspective in life and situation. Thus, diaspora succeeds in achieving those purposes which are not intended to celebrate virtues, marginality,

multicultural aspects and diversity. Some significant writers of new diaspora are Rohinton Mistry, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, Monica Ali, Kiran Desai and Indira Ganesan. This paper reveals the process of Jasmine's assimilation and the resultant transformation in an alien land.

Keywords: Diaspora, culture, migration, homeland, identity.

## Introduction

The old Indian diaspora split far from oral history and entered magnificent history as landless individuals ended up as recorded subjects on immigration passes. The general population of the new Indian diaspora are of a different order as described by Bharati Mukherjee in her novel *Jasmine*:

But we are refugees and mercenaries and guest workers, You see us sleeping in airport lounges; you watch as unwrapping the last of our native foods, unrolling our prayer rugs, reading our holy books, taking our for the hundredth time an aerogramme promising a job or space to sleep, a newspaper in our language, a photo of happier time, a passport, a visa, a laissez-passer [1].

The homes are built by Diasporas in such ways that are entirely unexpected from the general population of the country themselves. For example, for an Indian in the diaspora, India is an altogether different sort of country than for the Indian national.

The concept of identity is very important for the diasporic people. Immigrants speak different languages and have different professional and vocations but what gives them a communality of identity is the consciousness of their origin, cultural heritage and a deep attachment to their homeland. The migrant writings deal with the issues like home, self and

identity. Thus diaspora is all about the creation of new identities, space for growth, resolution of conflicts and a new culture, either composite or plural.

We see Bharati Mukherjee's heroines as transformed ones. They are more Americanized, and do not mean that they have left their homeland. They are the example of those who are not affected by the host country. They retain their own native culture intact with pride. Mukherjee's works emphasize stories that claim America; they feature subjects who liberate themselves through struggles against racism to a stable identity and location.

The novel *Jasmine* is a record which symbolizes Jasmine's endeavour and the anxious pursuit of a rootless individual provoked by a discouraging feeling of loneliness all around. The protagonist leaves her husband (here, Bud) for opportunity and open alliance with another white American man. Mukherjee does not force readymade answers for the issues looking by migrant Asian women. She favors demonstrating them obtaining the power so as to control their destinies. At times they offer role models for some migrant women. Fakrul Alam composes:

Once literature begins to serve as forum illuminating female experience, it can assist in humanizing and equilibrating the literature, the culture, value system which has served predominantly male interests. A literary work is capable of providing role models, instill a positive sense of feminine identity by portraying women who are self actualizing whose identities are not dependant on men [2].

The novel reveals a more positive approach to the problem of immigration. In this novel, Mukherjee celebrates both the undaunted psyche and passion of a suburban girl who bloomed out of a wounded past into a challenging persona and a whole individual with that status of migration in the US, which encourages outsiders not exclusively to be acculturated yet in addition to be integrated into their adopted land. Jasmine sheds her Indian name and

adjusts effectively to each situation of life disregarding episodic recollections of life in India; she is never ended by the conflict of conventional Indian and the American world she faces.

The novel opens with a village prophet under his banyan tree predicting Jasmine's 'widowhood' and 'outcast'. Everything turns out just as dreadfully as he says it will, and yet Jasmine is a survivor, a contender and adapter. Mukherjee has outlined the Jyoti of Hasnapur (who, later on, moves toward becoming Jasmine and Jase and Jane) as a revolutionist against blind convictions and superstitions.

Blazing against destiny and the standards of society which attempted to condition her reality, Jasmine proclaims that she isn't simply nothing. She doesn't trust in the common conviction that ‘‘village girls are like cattle; whichever way you lead them, that is the way they will go’’(p.46). To pursue her convictions, she rejects the gentleman suitor selected by her grandmother and in the end winds up marrying Prakash Vih in court.

With Prakash, a young engineer, who too is obsessed like her to make ‘‘something more of his life than fate intended’’ (p.85). Jyoti begins the journey of realizing her self and potential. The doomed and hopeless village girl in Jyoti becomes Jasmine, wife of a modern man, Prakash.

Enthused by Prakash's plans of eventually settling into a much better lifestyle in America with their own business concern, she starts assisting him. They begin to fantasizing their life in America, but are ill-struck by their fate. Prakash, on the eve of his departure to America, is murdered by Sikh rebels, rendering Jasmine broken hearted, grief-stricken and desolate. But she does not allow this tragedy to discourage herself. Defying against the idea of spending the rest of her life as a deprived widow at Hasnapur, she decides to America on a forged passport; her plan of committing ‘Sati’ after reaching the campus, where Prakash wanted to enroll, is a gesture of protest. The daring of the simple village girl in promising this dangerous trip abroad is part of her intrinsic liking to the American ideal of valiant endeavor.

She is offended by the precariousness of her life in an alien land:

“What country? What continent? We pass through wars, rough plagues. I am hungry for the news, but the discarded papers are in characters or languages I cannot read” (p.101). Over and over she understands that she is an immigrant and other in America-an unlawful settler without visa, living among outsiders whose ways she thinks nothing about. She is constantly uncertain about American being and considering, suffers embarrassment and dissatisfaction. As she mutters: "This country has so many ways of humiliating, of disappointing” (p.29).

However, she travels to the new world on a ship called The Gulf Shuttle.

The commander of the ship, Half-Face callously assaults Jasmine and this shock is a lot for an Indian widow. After her assault, she decides to execute herself however before she could do as such she finds that she needs to live. Immediately, she perceives: " I couldn't give my own disrespect a chance to upset my main goal" (p.117). She expands her, tongue and cuts it, blood flowing- an ideal revengeful picture of Goddess Kali out to oppose and devastate the demon who has abused her virtuousness.

Subsequently, she responds emphatically after this fierce experience with the disgusting humanity. Her executing of Half-Face is a sort of self-declaration.

Jasmine starts afresh, she has no time to ponder over the consequences of murder and so must think of her mission to move away from the scene of violence. She walks out draught, dead tired, with no destination in mind. When she falls down out of starvation, and fatigue, Lillian Gordon, a benevolent Quaker woman sympathizes her condition; she symbolizes, for Jasmine, the best in the American experience and character. Under Gordon's consideration she experiences change and forsakes her Hasnapuri garments and humility. She adapts to the new environment and responds positively to the speed of transformation.

Jasmine moves to New York as she believes Professor ji, Prakash's old

University Professor, who now lives here, will help her to settle in. But she feels awkward in Professorji's home, which they have changed over into a Punjabi ghetto. That is the reason she can get away from the Indian ghetto in Flushing and adjust to the standards of supreme American culture (advancement) yet that does not mean she throws her race, her religion, her convictions (custom).

C. Sen Gupta says that: "a true feminist, Jasmine, does not hold fast to a nostalgia that is dead but maintains certain basic traits of Indian culture even after imbibing American Culture"<sup>3</sup>

Next we see Jasmine with Taylor and Wylie Hayes as a 'caregiver' (p.175) to their adopted daughter, Duff.

Here, she relishes the most of her new monetary freedom just as the sympathetic treatment she is offered by her bosses, Taylor specifically. This is the best time of her stay in the U.S. Taylor gives her another name 'Jase'. Her response at Taylor's home is all in all positive. She is altogether enthusiastic for her existence with Hayeses. In the new environment filled with care and warmth, Jasmine turns out to be more Americanized, further sure of her capability in English.

With infinite care Mukherjee traces her protagonist's cautious evolution, but sometimes there is a disagreement between Jasmine's two persona's, one still belonging to conventional Indian morals of life, and other an explorer in a capitalist society. As she so concisely puts it: "for every Jasmine the reliable caregiver, there is a Jase the profligate adventurer. I thrilled to the tug of opposing forces" (pp.176-177).

However, she is not unmindful of the positive side of American character. She acknowledges the Americans for their autonomy of thought and their feeling of regard notwithstanding for those doing humble works. She doesn't hold quick to a 'dead nostalgia'. Jasmine herself is absorbed in the American world forgetting all about her curious journey as she herself accepts "Jyoti was now a sati-goddess; she had burned herself in a trash-cum-

funeral pyre behind a boarded-up motel in Florida. Jasmine lived for future, for Viji and Wife. Jase went to movies and lived for today'' (p.136).

Jasmine's transformation seems to stem from a reaction, but rather from her very own yearning for personal change.

Jasmine's life in Iowa again begins with her chance meeting with Mother Ripplemeyer, the Iowan counterpart of Lillian Gordon. She offers Jasmine a job in the bank owned by her own son, Bud. He not only gives her a new life but also a new name-Jane. She has almost totally appropriated American culture, Jasmine perceives herself as being assimilated; she in fact becomes the typical American that she always wanted to be.

From the Sati-goddess Jyoti" (p.176) to the Kali- Jasmine to "adventurous Jase se" (p.186) to "Plain Jane"(p.26) has been a memorable, uneven odyssey; the heroine's name changes just as her home changings move toward becoming analogies for migrant woman's procedure of uprooting and rerooting.

In assessing her at various times and conceiving her future, Jasmine stands up to the multifaceted nature and assortment of her way of life as a migrant woman. Apparently self-assured and tolerant, Jane, as we find her through interior monologue, is extremely shaking. Comparing herself to a "tornado" (p.215) she ponders over the progressions that are yet to reshape her future.

Through Jasmine's reactions, Bharati Mukherjee presents the immigrant woman's personal journey as movement from self- deprivation to self- complacency.

Every movement adds to jasmine's self-assurance and her experience directs her future strategy. She is elegant, altering and legitimizes her every single job. Mukherjee's following perception verges on acknowledgement note: "The kinds of women I write about are those who are adaptable. We have all been raised to please, been trained to be adaptable

as wives, and that adaptability is working to the women's advantage when we come over as immigrants" [4]. Evidently, Jasmine reacts very swiftly to the developmental characters of the American community and instantaneously infuses it in her personality.

Sushma Tandon observes that: "Despite many difficulties, Jasmine survives with grace, holding on to her capacity to make a new life for herself. The world is in motion as never before, with massive migrations altering the trajectory of millions of lives" [5]. Jasmine's different reactions in diaspora show that she has confidence in real life which is expressive, imaginative and indicates development she assumes "We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams" (p.29).

In this way the very quintessence of Jasmine's experience consists in the ideas of countless alternatives. She demonstrates by her coarseness and assurance that change and versatility are vital to survival, and that an affluent migrant requires ability.

Her responses demonstrate that, depicted as a vivacious woman, she rebels against destiny and traditions at each point. Jasmine has the strength to change her fantasies into the real world and isn't just a way discoverer loaded with self-assurance yet in addition a model, a pioneer for all women classes eager for freedom from the shackles of age-old creeds.

Bharati Mukherjee effectively transmits a message through Jasmine's distinctive responses in another nation, who is exposed to different codes of society and geographic places. Jasmine acculturates herself to the standard culture of the adopted land. The past must be cleared out. The author concedes that the life of a foreigner includes a sequence of rebirths. In one of her interviews she confesses:

I have been murdered and reborn at least three times, the very correct woman I was trained to be and was very happy being, is very different from the politicized, shrill, civil

rights activist I was in Canada, and from the urgent writer that I have become in the last few years in the United States [6].

Jasmine undergoes a similar plight. At every stage of change there are mixed feelings of fear, anger, bitterness and confusion; yet every stage is a discovery of herself within her there is the unconquerable desire and also struggle for self-denial and self-realization

## Conclusion

For Jasmine nothing is fixed; everything is in movement. Jasmine appreciates the status of migration by an absolute desire to associates herself to her adopted land. She recognizes herself as an American and no longer a foreigner. Consequently, it is obvious from Jasmine's responses that the heroine, Jasmine, rebels against age-old conventions and superstitions, yet in addition influences an appropriate harmony among tradition and innovation. The novel is a celebration of the quality of a woman, not her shortcoming. Through the woman protagonist, the writer has proclaimed the versatile feeling and resistance of contemporary Indian woman, in India as well as in New World.

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